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ABSTRACT

Activities that employ the five themes of geography--location, place, relationships within places, movement, and regions--to teach about Venezuela and Mexico are described in this document. Each theme has objectives, a list of materials, and three types of activities--exploration, invention, and expansion. Background information on Venezuela and Mexico also is provided for teachers. (DB)

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Using the Five Themes of Geography to Teach about Venezuela and Mexico

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Background Information

Venezuela was a mostly agrarian society which changed dramatically after 1914 when oil was discovered near Maracaibo. Today it is considered to be the richest country in Latin America and is one of the largest producers and exporters of oil among the world's nations.

It has an extensive coastline on the Caribbean Sea and 72 islands. Its neighbors are Guyana to the east, Brazil to the south and Colombia to the West. About 18,000,000 people live in Venezuela. The country has four distinct regions, the Maracaibo Lowlands around semi-salt Lake Maracaibo; the vast central plain of the Llanos of the Orinoco River; the Andean Highlands to the west and along the coast; and the Guyana Highlands, which take up over half of the country. Farming has always faced many obstacles in Venezuela from mountainous terrain to swamps around Lake Maracaibo. When the country was mostly agrarian it was also mostly very poor because of these obstacles.

Venezuela is mostly tropical in climate with little change from season to season. Temperature differs in the country mostly because of altitude. In Caracas, at about 3000 feet, there are moderate temperatures between a maximum of 32 Celsius in July and August, and an occasional minimum of 9 Celsius in January. The nights are always cool. Maracaibo is hot and humid as are much of the Llanos. The Highlands are often quite cool because of their altitude. Rainfall varies from 762 mm in Caracas to 573 in Maracaibo to 1,295 in Merida in the Andean Highlands, to 2540 in parts of Barinas state and Amazonas territory in southern Venezuela bordering on Brazil.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Venezuela was inhabited by various tribes of Caribes and Arawaks who were ineffective in resisting the Spanish. The first permanent Spanish settlement was at Cumana in 1520. Settlers formed mostly agricultural settlements at Barqisimento in 1552 and at Caracas in 1567. Uprisings against Spanish control took place in 1749, 1775, and 1797. Simon Bolivar, born in Caracas in 1783, led a movement to achieve independence with some success. After great efforts including a dramatic march over the Andes in 1819, the revolutionaries push Spain out with Spanish forces surrendering in 1823. Since 1958, Venezuela has had a stable democracy with regular presidential elections every 5 years. Carlos Andres Perez began his second term in office in 1989.

Over 50% of Venezuelans are under age 18. A large number are of mixed Spanish and Indian blood. There are some pure Indians, mostly in the Guyana Highlands and in the forests west of Lake Maracaibo. African

heritage is strong in many port cities. Since the 1950's nearly a million European immigrants have arrived and have changed the composition of the population.

Most Venezuelans (79%) live in urban areas. Caracas is by far the largest city with about 5,000,000 million inhabitants.

Venezuela is wealthy but has many serious problems. About 12% of its people are unemployed and about 10% are illiterate. Many rural dwellers have moved to the cities. As a result, Venezuela must import food including basic foodstuffs such as beans and rice. Only about 20% of the land is devoted to agriculture and about three-fourths of this is pasture. Mining is a successful part of the economy, employing 15% of the workforce. Gold, bauxite, iron ore and coal are mined. Venezuela is Latin America's fourth largest debtor but has been attempting to restructure its debt to enable it to meet its obligations.

There are 20 states in this federal republic, a Federal District, and two territories. Elementary school is free and education is compulsory from age 7 through the completion of primary school. There are 35 national parks and 15 smaller national monuments.

Activities

Theme: Location

Venezuela

Objectives:

Students will make observations of materials relating to Venezuela such as pictures and music.
Students will locate Venezuela, its four distinct regions, and Caracas.
Students will accurately describe the location of a site in Venezuela.

Materials: Pictures of Venezuela, Latin American music (preferably salsa--Venezuela is famous for it), tape recorder, a world map, and one of Latin America. Other materials could include artifacts, pictures of Venezuelan money, stamps and foods. Also, 2 small "V" 's cut out of construction paper, a small amount of clay.

Exploration

1. Give students opportunities to explore a learning center which contains pictures of Venezuela, the maps, and a tape recorder with Latin American music playing and other materials as available. Ask them to think about "What is familiar about these things?" as they make observations of the materials in the center.
2. Ask each student to identify one item of particular interest. List these on

the chalkboard or on an overhead transparency. Ask students to identify those characteristics with which they are familiar. Circle these in the list. Then, ask them to identify those with which they were not familiar. Star these.

Invention

1. Ask a student to locate Venezuela on the Latin America map and attach a small construction-paper "V" to it with a dab of clay. Have the students describe Venezuela's location in terms of who its neighbors are. Note the Caribbean Sea. Then have them describe which part of Latin America it is in (northern).
2. Ask another student to locate Venezuela on the world map and attach a "V" to it with a dab of clay. Discuss Venezuela's location in relation to the USA, to Europe, Africa, etc.
3. Then provide students with mystery clues to help them identify the four main regions found in Venezuela. Possible clues include:

   "I am a region that includes a large lake and the area around that lake. There are mountains around me." (the lowlands of Maracaibo)

   "I am a region of mountains that begin north of Maracaibo and run to the Colombian border. Some of my mountains have snow on their peaks all year ." (Andean highlands)

   " I am an upland region south of the Orinoco River . I cover half of Venezuela down to the Brazil border. I have both grassland and forests."
   (Guayana Highlands)

   "I am a region an area of flat grasslands lying between the Andes and the Orinoco River, with lots of slow-running rivers. " (the Llanos of the Orinoco)

   Ask students to locate each region in Venezuela as it is identified and to suggest its boundaries. As possible, have pictures of each region available for students to look at.
4. Next, ask students to decide what the biggest city is and to locate it (Caracas). Can they identify and locate any other major cities?
5. Finally, ask them to examine the coastline. Are there any major cities on it? Are there any islands which belong to Venezuela along it (Margarita Island is the most famous and is a resort center)?
6. Closure: Ask students to compose a one paragraph description of where Venezuela is and to describe the location of various regions within it. Then ask them to share their descriptions in small groups of 3-5 and to develop a group description. These can be kept in a Venezuela notebook.

Expansion

Ask students to remain in their small groups. Then ask each group to select one region of Venezuela, a city, an island, a river, a national park or other identifiable location. Next, ask each group to write a description of its location which can be used in a "mystery clue" game. Play the game in class. Have each group post its description and the location it describes on a Venezuela bulletin board. If a picture of the location is available, place it with the description.

Theme: Place

Venezuela

Objectives:

Students will identify major physical features of Venezuela.
Students will compare average temperature and rainfall figures for various sites in Venezuela with those of their own community.
Students will identify common plants and animals found in Venezuela.
Students will describe the physical characteristics of Venezuelans.
Students will identify common occupations found in Venezuela.
Students will make a diorama which contains features which identify the scene depicted as Venezuelan.

Materials: drawing materials and drawing paper, map of Venezuela and/or Latin America, rulers and other distance measuring equipment, a video on Venezuela or Latin America, temperature and rainfall figures for various sites in Venezuela and for your community, clay for each student to make a diorama, and a variety of paints to use in painting the diorama.

Exploration

Acknowledge that the students have limited information, other than location, about Venezuela, its regions, and cities. Ask them to use their imagination and pretend they live in one of the regions or cities discussed in the previous lesson. "What view would they see if they stepped out of the door of their house in this location?' Ask they to draw a picture of this view. Ask the students to share their drawings with other members of a small group of 3-5. Ask each group to pick out the view they think is the most similar to what they might see in the USA and to present their choice to the class. As they do so, list characteristics identified as "most similar to the USA" on the chalkboard or overhead.

Invention

1. Ask the students to look at a map of Venezuela and/or Latin America. What kinds of physical features (rivers, mountains, etc.) are there? Estimate distances, lengths of rivers, mountain chains and other features. These can be compared with similar physical features in the USA. Did any of the students include any of these characteristics in their pictures of the view from their house in Venezuela in the activity above?
2. Give students temperature and rainfall statistics for various locations in Venezuela. Where could they find this information for their community? Have resource information available or ask students to obtain it. Such information can be obtained through local weather bureaus at television stations. Ask students to create bar graphs which give the average temperature and rainfall for their community and for various sites in Venezuela. What inferences can they make? How similar are the temperature and rainfall figures for various parts of Venezuela? How similar are they in comparison to their home community?
3. What plants and animals would flourish at the temperatures and rainfall levels found in Venezuela? Would the same plants and animals flourish in each region? How can we find out what plants and animals are there? Suggest students refer to pictures and materials used in the first lesson. This is a good time to show a video on Latin America. Students can find some interesting information, for example, large cavys (guinea pigs) are farm raised in the llanos region as a meat animal.
4. Who lives in Venezuela? Ask students to examine the pictures, a video or other material. Ask them to begin to describe what the average Venezuelan looks like. Is this possible? Are they finding large variations? They should find much variation. How can they account for this? Is there a wide variation in the USA? How has this occurred? What influences do they think exist in Venezuela (they are likely to mention Indians and Spanish settlers)? The influence of Africans (originally brought to Venezuela as slaves) and of recent large-scale European immigration can be described. As possible, have pictures available of Amazonian tribal people since some are found in Venezuela near the border with Brazil and of Andean people. These two groups differ quite a bit from each other in physical appearance. Considering the earlier discussion of plants and animals, rainfall, cities and other factors, what occupations do you think these people have. Focus on agriculture and the oil industry.
6. Closure: Venezuela has been described as a place in many ways. We have looked at its people, their occupations, the plants and animals, rainfall and temperature, and physical features. Ask the children to work in small groups and construct a comparison chart. List each of these categories on the chart. Next, make two columns, one for Venezuela and one for the USA. Then, write similarities and differences found between the countries in each column. For example, under temperature students might list "a very wide range of temperatures" under the USA and "a smaller range of temperatures" under Venezuela. These charts should be posted in the classroom.

Expansion

Ask students to construct a diorama of a view in Venezuela using clay. This can be painted when hard. In Venezuela clay figures, models and dioramas are made and sold as local craft items. These are simply made and are painted in bright colors. Ask the children to describe what they made and what features identify it as Venezuelan.

Theme: Relationships Within Places

Venezuela

Objectives:

Students will identify criteria by which they would choose a site on which to settle in Venezuela.
Students will examine the most heavily populated areas of Venezuela and suggest reasons for the concentration of people in those areas.
Students will identify examples of how people have changed the land in Venezuela.
Students will construct a role play which identifies reasons for agreeing to or disagreeing with the proposal to build the Guarico Dam.

Materials: maps of Venezuela and/or Latin America, pictures of Venezuela, encyclopedias and other resource books.

Exploration

Ask the students to imagine that they were Indians or Spaniards first coming to Venezuela. They want to find a good place to live. What do they think they need to look for in a living site? Ask them to work in small groups of 3-5. Ask each group to list out their criteria for selecting a living site. Then ask them to select a site in Venezuela. Ask each group to share their site and their criteria with each the class. On the chalkboard or an overhead, write out a list which includes all the criteria used by the groups.

Invention

1. Ask the students to note where the population of Venezuela is heaviest (in Caracas, along the coast, in some inland cities such as Maracaibo and Merida.) Did any group select one of these sites? If yes, ask the group(s) to describe their criteria and how this site fulfills it. This may well be at least part of the explanation for why this is a well-populated site in Venezuela. If no, discuss how their criteria might also fit these sites, if

applicable.

Discuss what criteria may have led to the population of those sites which are more heavily populated in Venezuela. You can discuss some factors they may not have thought of. For example, Caracas is not located on the coast, although there is a port town, La Guaira, there. Instead, it is located in a high mountain valley at 960 meters, on the other side of a mountains with a pass at 1040 meters. Today an expressway links Caracas and La Guaira. In the past, it was a mule trail which took a few days to travel up and over the mountains through the pass. Why wasn't Caracas located on the coast? The answer that Venezuelan's usually give is that the original Spanish settlers were afraid of the many pirates who sailed the Caribbean. They located their community inland with mountains between them and the coast as a way of protecting themselves from quick pirate raids. If the students had not identified safety as a criterion for locating a community, this could be added to the class list of criteria. Students can consider which criteria applied to the location of their community.

2. How have people used the land in Venezuela? By examining pictures of Venezuela, maps, and using encyclopedias and other resource books, ask the groups of students to identify major uses of land in Venezuela. They should note agriculture and mining. They may also note taking advantage of the tourist potential of the coastline and Caribbean islands. Drilling for oil is another use which may be noted. Which of these are uses the land is also put to in the USA?
3. How have people changed the land? Ask students to look for dams or other evidence of how people have changed the land in Venezuela on maps and in resource books. The Gurarico Dam project, for example, has flooded millions of hectacres of land. What evidence is there in their own community and nearby areas of how people have changed the land?
4. Closure: Discuss how Venezuelans have related to and interact with their land. Ask the students to help you compose a summary paragraph which describes this relationship. Ask each student to copy it down in a Venezuela notebook.

Expansion

Ask each group of students to develop a role play which focuses on Venezuelans and the land. They should pretend they are a group of people who are farming in the area where the Guarico Dam is now located. They are being asked to vote on whether or not the dam should be located in this position. It will mean that they must move. Will they decide it is a good or a poor idea? Have the students perform their role plays for the class. When they are finished, summarize the viewpoints that were expressed and the reasons for those viewpoints through a class discussion.

Theme: Movement

Venezuela

Objectives:

Students will select a means of travel to and from Venezuela.
Students will list reasons why people might move to Venezuela and why they would leave it.
Students will identify imports and exports of Venezuela.
Students will suggest routes traveled and difficulties encountered in travel by the Caribes and Spaniards to Venezuela.
Students will describe the effect of location on movement.

Materials: maps of Venezuela and/or Latin America, a world map, travel brochures for air and sea travel to Venezuela (available from travel agents), resource books, construction paper, scissors.

Exploration

Set out brochures advertising travel to Venezuela by air and by sea and give students have a chance to examine them. Point out the Pan American highway. Place them in groups of 3-5. Tell them they will be planning a trip to Venezuela. Today they will decide on how they will get there and back. They do not need to use the same mode of travel each way. Tomorrow they will work on what they will do and see while they are there. Ask each to group to answer the question, "How will we get to and from Venezuela." Ask groups to share their decision with the class. Have them contribute to a bulletin board called "Venezuela, Here We Come!" Divide the bulletin board into two sections, "Going There" and "Going From There". Then ask each group to indicate the mode(s) of travel they have selected by making and putting an airplane, automobile, or ship in each section.

Invention

1. We have begun planning a trip to Venezuela as tourists. Some people do move to Venezuela to live there permanently and some move out of it to live somewhere else permanently. Why do they move there or move away? Let's first think about why someone would move to the USA. Create a list of reasons on the chalkboard or overhead as students suggest them. Would any of these be reasons for moving to Venezuela? Discuss their ideas. Then, consider why someone would move away from the USA. Would any of these be reasons for leaving Venezuela?
2. Ask students to examine resource books which would suggest reasons for moving to and from Venezuela. Certainly, the oil industry had a boom in Venezuela during the 1970's as it did in other parts of the world. This would have encouraged people to move there for jobs. Other people,

such as Cubans or Salvadorans, may have moved to Venezuela because of political strife or even war in their countries. With the bust in the oil industry's boom during the 1980's people may have moved out of Venezuela as the economy suffered from the bust. Have them draw two pictures, one which indicates a reason for moving to Venezuela and one which indicates a reason for moving out of it. Then have them discuss their pictures with their group and develop a group list of reasons for moving in and reasons for moving out. Ask the groups to share their lists and contribute to a class list written on the chalkboard or overhead transparency.

3. The travel and tourism industry is important to some extent in Venezuela but not as much as are the oil and mining industries. What products does Venezuela export to the world? (oil, bauxite, gold and coal are very important). What products does it import (food and many technical products from cameras to photocopy machines). Students can use resource materials to find this information. Ask each group to design symbols for imported and exported products. These symbols can be put on the"Venezuela: Here We Come!" bulletin board. The imports can be put on a large ship posted in the "Going There" column. The exports can be put on a large ship posted in the "Going From There" column.
4. Closure: Discuss how people and goods move to and from Venezuela. How does its location effect the movement of people and goods? Ask the students to compose a summary statement answering this question. Then ask volunteers to read their statements. Have the class formulate a whole group summary statement and write it out on the chalkboard or overhead transparency. Ask the students to write it down in their Venezuela notebooks.

Expansion

Ask students to meet in their groups to consider how the Caribe Indians and the Spaniards originally traveled to Venezuela. Ask them to look at a map of the world to determine this. We are not sure where the Caribe Indians came from, but it may have been from islands in the Caribbean. Both the Caribes and the Spaniards would not have had as much information as is available on a map. What difficulties would they have had in traveling to Venezuela? After discussing this question in their groups, ask the students to draw a rough sketch indicating the point of origin they have decided on for the Caribe. Then, they should sketch in the possible route taken by the Caribes and the possible route taken by the Spanish. along the route they may indicate difficulties which might have been encountered. The groups should share their ideas about points of origin, routes, and difficulties encountered with the class. Summarize by pointing out that movement, getting to and from somewhere, is a pretty complicated effort.

Theme: Regions

Venezuela

Objectives:

Students will

Materials: map of Venezuela, travel brochures, resource materials (such as travel magazines, encyclopedias, and pictures), a box of toothpicks, a small amount of clay.

Exploration

Ask the students "What would you like to do while you are a tourist in Venezuela?" Ask each student to contribute to a class list of possible activities such as, "hiking in a national part," "surfing off Margarita Island," "visiting an Andean village," "watching a soccer game," "shopping," " seeing parrots in Amazonas territory."

Invention

1. The students have suggested a list of possible activities for a tourist. Which ones can they actually do if they are a tourist? Suggest that they will need to find out what is really possible if they are going to plan a trip in Venezuela. Tell them you would like them to develop an itinerary for a two week trip. What information will they need to know? For example, should they check on what language is spoken in each region of Venezuela? Would it be important to get some information on what there is to see in each region of Venezuela? How do people travel from one region to the other? How do they travel within a region? What other information do they need? Write down possible questions as students suggest them.
2. Suggest that groups might research each area as a means of saving time and effort. Each group could provide the class with a summary of what to see and do and how to get there for their region. One group could be assigned to the city of Caracas, also. Then, plan together what types of activities each group will be investigating using the list of preferred activities compiled in the exploration. For example, each group might investigate the availability of sports events, historic sites, national parks, and museums in the region for which they are responsible.
3. Give students time to accomplish their group task using resource materials in the classroom, the public library, and other resources.
4. Ask each group to provide each student with a summary for their region and to verbally describe the information on it.
5. Ask each student to plan the itinerary for their trip. Remove the materials placed earlier on the "Venezuela: Here We Come!" bulletin board and post each student's itinerary.
6. Closure: Ask each student to describe an activity that they think would be

a highlight of their trip, and to locate the region in which this activity would occur. Have the student use a dab of clay, and stick a toothpick on a map of Venezuela in the region in which the activity will occur. After each student has finished, discuss which region has the most toothpicks on it and how the regions compare in attractions for tourists of their age.

Expansion

Wrap up this series of lessons with a Venezuela Day. Students can listen to salsa music and prepare and eat a favorite Venezuelan treat. Fruit and vegetable juices and drinks are very popular in Venezuela. Students can make these if a few blenders are brought into class. They can make cantaloupe, banana, mango, or peach drink by putting a some fruit, such as a banana, into a blender, adding 3-4 ice cubes, 1/2 to 1 cup of milk, and a tablespoon of sugar. Blend this for a minute or until ice is ground up. The result will be a foamy drink that is cool and delicious. Carrot juice can be made by blending two sliced raw carrots with a small amount of water (1/4 to 1/2 cup is often enough). Fried plantain ("plantado") can also be fun to eat. Plantain are available in many large supermarkets. They look like large bananas with a green skin. They can be mashed and patted into small pancakes. These are then fried on a griddle and sprinkled with sugar.

Resources on Venezuela

Tourist information is available from:

* Corporturismo, Apartado 50.200, Caracas, Venezuela.
* Aeropostal Airlines, 1-800-468-5526
* Avensa Airlines, 40 W. 57th St., Suite 1515, NY, NY, 10019, 1-212-956-8229

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